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I am writing to urge the Senate Education Committee to amend the current Senate Bill 1160 so that seniority – Last In First Out (LIFO)- may not be used as the sole determinant in deciding teacher layoffs.

Although I firmly agree with the argument that teacher effectiveness should be the determining factor in such decisions, I would like to draw your attention to another concern I have with the present policy. Currently, low performing school districts like Bridgeport have difficulty attracting and keeping teachers, especially in math, science and world languages. In fact the Connecticut Department of Education has designated these areas as subject shortage areas across the state.

At the same time, the Public Act 10-111, passed in May of 2010, requires that starting with the high school graduating class of 2018, seniors will be required to pass examinations in algebra, geometry, biology, American History and English. (At the present time, 40% of high school graduates across the state must take remedial math when they enter college, a good indicator as to how our current educational system is failing our students.)

Now 2018 may seem like a long way off, but the students who will graduate that year will be 6th graders next fall. I was a volunteer math tutor in Bridgeport for four years, working with 6th through 8th graders. I can assure you that much of the foundation for high school math must be laid in these grades. Unfortunately, many of my students were already behind in their understanding of basic mathematical concepts by the time they reached 6th grade.

Since school districts like Bridgeport have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers in math and science, when they do hire staff in these areas, these new teachers will be the most at risk of losing their jobs when budget constraints necessitate layoffs. I can understand why young, bright math and science teachers are reluctant to apply to these inner city school districts. Not only do they have fewer resources and lower pay, but they know that there is a greater probability that they will lose their jobs within the first few years, as these districts are the ones struggling financially. They also know that their hard work will not likely be recognized because we do not have an evaluation system in place that can systematically recognize and support high quality teaching.

If Connecticut is serious about improving math and science education so that our students can be competitive in the global economy, we cannot ignore the fact that the current evaluation systems and our system of using seniority alone to determine which teachers remain in the classroom during budget driven layoffs will severely hamper this effort. Senate Bill 1160 is a start down that road, but I urge you to fix current teacher layoff policy so that our students are best served. We cannot afford to wait one or two more years as our students slip farther and farther behind. 2018 will be here before we know it.

Sincerely,
Marcy Hardt